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ABSTRACT

This document briefly discusses the planning and implementation of a Child Development Associate (CDA) program developed to fulfill the requirements of a Head Start Supplementary Training (HSST) grant at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. One of the first steps in organizing the CDA program was to convince potential candidates for 51 Head Start agency positions that a CDA credential was both desirable and attainable. CDA courses, incorporating supervised field experience and classroom instruction, were developed to train candidates for the credential. The project staff also prepared an "HSST/CDA Trainee Handbook" (described but not included in this document) to guide trainees in the development and assessment of the CDA competencies. (BRT)

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What Has CDA Accomplished for A Head Start Supplementary Training Program?

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In the spring of 1973, the Office of Child Development (OCD) guidelines made it clear that institutions providing training for Head Start Supplementary Training (HSST) grants would either have to develop Child Development Associate (CDA) programs or give up their HSST program. At that time a percentage of the HSST trainee slots were designated for CDA training.

The problems and frustrations which have emerged with this OCD plan have been numerous. One has to stop and recognize where the Child Development Associate Consortium was in its development when this OCD decision was reached. The CDA Consortium is OCD-funded but sponsored and supported by many professional organizations (Collins, 1972). The number of organizations represented on the CDA Consortium Board has grown steadily since its beginning. This steady growth has brought new concerns and considerations to Board decisions which has resulted in delays of materials and assessment procedures for CDA candidates.

At the time HSST grantees were directed to move to CDA programs, the CDA Consortium and OCD were ready to supply only the barest of CDA program guidelines and assessment procedures were not available (Williams and Ryan, 1972).

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With the exception of those few HSST programs which were funded by the CDA Consortium as field testing programs, most HSST institutions found themselves in the business of writing a competency-based program which would hopefully meet the yet-to-be-developed criteria of the CDA Consortium. The problems and frustration related here were those faced by the program at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, but shared by many similar programs throughout the United States.

Since no procedures were available for adapting or adopting to the local HSST program two years ago, SIU-C took the option which allowed for a gradual phase-in and development of a CDA program. This allowed for some hope that by the second year, more information and procedural descriptions would be available from OCD or the CDA Consortium. It also allowed the project staff a year to encourage Head Start personnel (the potential trainees) that the CDA credential was a desirable one to obtain.

The HSST/CDA program at SIU-C serves sixty-two southern Illinois counties. For several years, only three Head Start agencies were served by the grant due to the distances existing between programs and the limited amount of funds available. These agencies were located in East St. Louis, Danville, and the Mounds-Cairo areas of the state. At the time CDA was initiated there were seventy-two training slots available. Fifty-one of these slots were designated for CDA candidates, preferrably Head Start classroom personnel. The remaining twenty-one slots were for persons currently in HSST and nearing completion of an AA or BA/BS degree.

As alluded to earlier one of the first steps was to convince potential candidates that a CDA credential was desirable. The list of competencies, which candidates are expected to attain, were overwhelming to many Head Start classroom personnel. The fact that a clearly identified means for assessment for a recognized national CDA credential was unavailable did

not help in the early information and training sessions. More recently as announcements were made by HSST/CDA programs in the region regarding trainees who had completed field testing procedures but had not received certificates, more and more questions were raised by candidates and prospective candidates regarding the future of the CDA credential.

An interview with C. Ray Williams, Executive Director of the Child Development Associate Consortium, and Jenny Klein, Director of Education Services, Program Development Innovation Division, Office of Child Development, in early 1973 indicates the stage of development of the CDA credential at that time. Williams indicated that procedures for credentialing had not yet been developed and Klein stated that she expected the CDA Consortium to develop a prototype assessment instrument by June, 1973 (The Development of the Child Development Associate [CDA] Program, 1973).

When it became apparent mid-way through the first year that only general procedures would be forthcoming from OCD, the project staff at SIU-C began to develop a plan which would guide trainees in the development and assessment of the CDA competencies. The result was an HSST/CDA Trainee Handbook (Quisenberry, et al, 1974).

In this program the first step for any new trainee is a self-assessment of the competencies. A CDA Self-Assessment Form developed by Program Manager, Mel Noe is used under his direction with each entering candidate. The form allows a frank appraisal of each candidate's present abilities and skills in the Head Start classroom.

The assessment form also gives direction to the trainee's program. Each trainee is able to determine what her needs are andtogether with the Program Manager set up the activities and courses which will help her attain the competencies she has identified as needing further work.

Meetings with Head Start personnel convinced the project staff that the list of competencies by itself could not serve as a guide for the trainees. After self-assessment, it was evident that the trainees needed more comprehensive guidelines as to what they should be doing in their classrooms to demonstrate that they had indeed achieved each competency. To provide this guideline the project staff developed a second section for the HSST/CDA Trainee Handbook. In this section each competency statement is presented separately. A statement of what the trainee "should know" and "should be able to do" follows each CDA competency statement. This statement provides a more practical understanding of the competencies.

Once the trainee has identified the competencies she wants to currently pursue, she is provided with a notebook containing only that portion of the HSST/CDA Trainee Handbook that applies to the competency.

In some cases where two competencies overlap in a particular course offering, she will receive both competencies. She also receives all assessment forms which pertain to the competency at this time.

Since it is possible to demonstrate competencies in many ways, the Handbook includes a section describing what the Local Assessment Team (LAT) might look for when the time comes for assessment. The trainees are told that this section is not inclusive, that there are probably many other ways that competencies could be met. They are told that their Field Supervisor or the course instructors will help them see how they can use their own classrooms to demonstrate the competencies.

This section was necessary for several reasons. Many of the centers are staffed by persons with no prior child care training. They have only a limited idea of what good child care methods might be. Secondly, many Head Start centers are poorly equipped which limits the methods currently in practice. A trainee entering the program from such a center might not

fully recognize the expectations held for her. Thus, from the beginning she realizes what is expected and can work toward the goal more realistically. The field supervisors and instructors realize that where materials and equipment are lacking and not available for the trainee to use, certain adaptations or substitutions will be necessary. For this reason, trainees are reassured that the Handbook is not all inclusive and that other activities will be developed to allow them to demonstrate competencies. Trainees are included in this planning and the continued development of their program.

The Handbook also provides a list of suggested equipment, materials, methods, etc. for each competency. A list of reading resources is included. These materials are included in the notebook provided for the trainees.

Finally, each competency includes a list of suggested assessment procedures to be used with the trainee. A variety of forms are used including checklists, records the trainee keeps, observation forms, and conference forms. Although the forms are given to the trainee for the competency she is working on, a trainee may move ahead to competencies she believes she can document before taking a related course.

The first year of working with the CDA program has been frustrating but exciting. The trainees have entered the courses with a good understanding of the need to relate the course work to their experiences in the classroom. Field supervisors meet regularly with each trainee to check off competencies and to plan work. There is close cooperation between the course instructors and the field supervisors.

The courses have been developed especially for the CDA program at SIU-C. The field experience or practicum is a part of the course credit. Field Supervisors are not the course instructors. The Field Supervisors

and instructors work together in planning for and helping the trainees. The Field Supervisors attend the trainees' classes occasionally and the instructors accompany the Field Supervisors as they visit the trainees.

One measure of success of the program at this early stage was indicated recently when the Program Manager made a visit to one of the agencies and was told by the Head Start Director that a number of his staff wanted to get into the CDA program next year. This was one of the agencies where the trainees had to be "sold" on the CDA concept a year ago.

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